



***Lousy Little Sixpence,
Stolen Generations and
Land of the Little Kings***

A Study Guide

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This trio of programmes deals with one of the most tragic and shameful stories of 20th Century Australia – the removal of Aboriginal children from their families for no reason other than the fact of their Aboriginality. From the earliest years of the 20th Century to the present struggles for Land Rights and Reconciliation, these films examine the personal fallout from a policy which is still effecting Aboriginal communities today.

All three programmes explore the common theme of the social and emotional dislocation caused to Aboriginal families and communities by the removal of children, but each film takes a different focus. The films could be used separately, as each is a valuable learning resource on its own, but students undertaking an in-depth study of the history of the Stolen Generations would benefit from a close examination of all three videos.

The series provides a valuable resource for students of History, SOSE, English, Religious Education and Media and it is suitable for secondary students, especially those from Years Nine to Twelve. It offers a range of insights, not only into the feelings of the stolen children and their families but also into the nature of a society that allowed these things to happen. The stories are told in a moving and often uplifting manner, with a marked absence of blame and a deep commitment to ensuring that this episode in Australia's history is never repeated.

The questions and activities which follow each episode are not grouped under subject headings as they may all be used in a variety of ways. The questions tend to begin with an historical focus, then branch into other disciplines.

Before Viewing the Videos

Students should be introduced to the basic story of the practice of separating Aboriginal children from their families and the reasons for the policy. Most Australian history texts written since the mid-1990s cover this chapter in Australia's history. Two such texts geared to middle school students are:

- Engwerda and Cotter, *SOSE: Australian History to 1975*, Jacaranda; and

- Darlington and Hospodaryk, *Australia in the 20th Century*, Heinemann.

The following extract from a speech by Malcolm Fraser also provides an insight into the origins of the practice and the philosophy behind it:

In 1937 in Canberra there was a meeting of Aboriginal 'protectors'. Aboriginal protectors were those responsible for Aboriginal policy and its implementation in their respective states. The Aboriginal 'protector' for Western Australia, Mr O.A. Neville, began the conference by saying the Aboriginal 'problem' must be looked at on a long term basis ... It was assumed that full-blood Aborigines, left to themselves, would die out because the theories of the time suggested that their genes were weak.

The real problem, according to Neville, was in half-bloods ... It was believed that the mixture of white and Aboriginal blood would strengthen the genes. And if the progeny of such a union were brought up in Aboriginal customs and practices, then Aboriginal traditions would survive and the 'problem' would be perpetuated for all time.

The key was to take half-caste children from their parents and to bring them up in a white environment.

The Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser

Some Useful Discussion Questions


- When and why did the practice of removing part Aboriginal children from their families develop?
- What justifications were offered for the practice by those who helped to carry it out?
- Should the words 'racist' or 'genocide' be applied to this policy? Explain.
- What do you think of the notion that those who designed and carried out this policy meant well and believed that what they were doing was for the best?

- Try to imagine what it would have been like for the stolen children and their families. Assume the role of a child who was taken, or the mother or father of that child. Convey your feelings in a short piece of writing – a poem, a reflection, a prayer or a piece of prose.

- What do you think Australians can do today to right some of the wrongs that were committed against the Aboriginal people in the past?

- ‘Those who suffered most severely under these policies cannot or will not tell their stories, therefore we will never know the true extent of the suffering caused’. What do you think of this statement?

- All three videos cover similar themes and approaches, but each gives a different insight into the issue of stolen children. In what ways are the three videos different, and how does each contribute its own dimension to our overall understanding of the issues?

- What is the value of videos such as these? Do you believe that they can change attitudes, or are they only viewed by those who are already sympathetic to the situation? 

Lousy Little Sixpence

Lousy Little Sixpence, which earns its title from the miserable wages paid to young Aboriginal servants (wages they rarely received), examines the experiences of five stolen children. Margaret Tucker, Bill Reid, Geraldine Briggs, Flo Caldwell and Violet Shea tell their stories in a moving manner. The main focus of this particular film is on the way that Aboriginal children were used to create a servant class for white employers. The film also examines the ways in which outspoken Aborigines began to organize and



- Can you suggest ways through which the messages of these films can be brought before those who don't know and those who don't want to know?

- Australians as a nation have shared in collective sorrow on several occasions in the past decade. The Port Arthur massacre, the Swiss canyoning tragedy, the Thredbo disaster, the Childers fire, bushfires, floods and man-made disasters have all been marked by Church services, periods of public silence and tributes of sincere sorrow. Why do you think that at least half of all Australians are unwilling to offer the same respect and acknowledgement to Indigenous people?

You may wish to revisit your answers to these questions after you have viewed the videos. ■



protest about their conditions, especially in the light of the celebration of one hundred and fifty years of (white) settlement in 1938.

With the aid of interviews, newsreels and film, the video builds up an empathetic picture of the experiences of these five people and their communities. Beginning in 1900, the film takes us through changing attitudes to the use of Aboriginal reserve land, the struggles of the Great Depression, the experiences of Aboriginal soldiers in World War II and the origins of the Aboriginal Rights movement in the 1930s.

Questions and Activities

- Explain why the Aboriginal Reserves were created in the first place, and why the Aboriginal people were gradually pushed off them in the early years of the 20th Century.

- What was the main aim of the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board in 1909? What strategies were developed to assist the Board to achieve this aim?

- Give five examples of treatment dealt to Aborigines that reflected the belief that they were inferior to whites.

- Trace the growth of Aboriginal activism from the establishment of the Aborigines League by William Cooper in 1932.

- Look carefully at the section of the film that deals with the celebration of 150 years of white settlement, in 1938. See if you can collect information about the ways that Aborigines were involved (used?) and the reactions of Aborigines, at the time of the bicentennial celebrations in 1988. Make a comparison of the two celebrations in terms of:

- The way in which the 1938 and 1988 events were described (words and phrases used, tone of voice, etc.), nature of the ceremonies, degree of involvement or use of Aborigines.

- Responses of Aborigines to the celebrations.

- Do you think that the experiences of 1938 and 1988 had any implications for the Sydney Olympic Games?

- Imagine you are a reporter sent to cover the Aborigines' strike at Cumeroogunga in February 1939. After interviewing several Aborigines across the river in Barmah, write a report on the walk-off which covers:



- background on Cumeroogunga (loss of best land, etc.);

- reasons for the walk-off (arrest of Jackie Patton);

- support from the Aboriginal League;

- rumours that they are Nazi or Communist sympathisers (quote other newspaper articles); and

- outcome of the strike.

- Listen carefully to the commentaries to the newsreel extracts that are used in this film. What do the commentaries tell you about the values of the period in which the films were made? (Take note of tone of voice, words used in the commentaries, techniques used to create certain impressions, etc.)

- What was ironic about the fact that Aborigines enlisted and fought for Australia in both World Wars?

- These people tell their terrible stories in a matter of fact manner and sometimes even with humour. Rarely is there bitterness in the way that they reflect on their experiences. How do you explain their attitudes?

- Many Christian missionaries regarded the Aborigines as pagans, but they had their own spiritual connection to the land and the soil. Research and report on an Aboriginal spiritual site or religious story. ■

Stolen Generations

Stolen Generations, directed and narrated by Aboriginal film-maker Darlene Johnson, continues the examination of the impact of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families during the 1950s and 1960s. Using the particular stories of Bobby Randall, Cleonie Quayle and Daisy Howard, the film expands upon the themes of *Lousy Little Sixpence*, showing the wide range of ways in which Aboriginal children were removed and the variety of destinations for the children.

The background to the policy of the removal of children is revealed as a conscious policy to eradicate the Aboriginal race. Historians Henry Reynolds and Marcia Langton explain in detail the laws and practices designed to ensure that half-caste children were brought up away from their culture. Marcia Langton actually shows us an article from an anthropological journal of the 1930s, which sets out the intermarriage 'recipe' for the breeding out of Aboriginality.


Using archival footage and clips from newsreels and television, the film takes the viewer on a journey of discovery



with the three central characters. For each, the journey is one of pain and suffering, with the shared awareness of how much each person has missed because of the separation. For Daisy Howard, despite the impossible wish that she had never been removed from her family, the journey ends on a positive note, as she is reunited with her sister May after fifty years.

The film ends as it began, with the stances taken by present day politicians on the issue of an apology. There is puzzlement and pain at the repeated refusal of the present Prime Minister John Howard to say sorry on behalf of the nation.

Questions and Activities

- Identify the various excuses offered and methods used to remove Aboriginal children from their families.
- Separated children were taken into many different types of situations and had a wide range of experiences. Identify as many as you can.
- List the short term and longer term consequences of removal for the children themselves.
- Use your answers to the above questions (and any other knowledge you have) to write a newspaper article entitled: 'Stolen Aboriginal Children – The Real Story'.
- Through the reminiscences of Bobby, Daisy and Cleonie we gain an insight into some of the differences in culture and values between European and Aboriginal Australians. (Some of Bobby's earliest problems related to clothes and hair, while Cleonie felt frightened and isolated by the bars around her cot.) Identify more of these differences. How do they help to explain why the whole programme of removal of children was doomed to failure?
- Are there any excuses that can be offered for those who took part in the removal of Aboriginal children? 

Land of the Little Kings

Land of the Little Kings covers ground familiar from the other two films, but it has an added philosophical dimension. Archie Roach's journey around Australia becomes a search for wholeness. He explores the experiences of five stolen children as he reconstructs his own story. He returns many times to the theme of the circle, explaining that when the circle of life is interrupted (as it is if a child is taken away), then life cannot be whole until the circle is rejoined. Archie's rendition of the haunting Paul Kelly song, 'Land of the Little Kings', forms the background theme for some of the most poignant scenes of loss and rediscovery in this trilogy. It ends where it began, at Archie's birthplace, Framlingham in Western Victoria. Archie was taken from there at the age of three, but having rediscovered his birthplace and family, it will always be where his journey ends:

- What evidence is there in the video that even from 'well-intentioned' people, the policy was racist?
- The theory of 'eugenics', which was popular in the 1930s, held that some races were superior to others. Find two other countries in the world that had racially based policies in the 1930s and compare them to the policies in Australia at the time.
- Carefully examine the newsreel extract 'Native Girls' Fairy Palace'.
- What are the underlying assumptions and values reflected in this piece, and what features of the film, narration and music convey these assumptions and values?
- Are there any questions you would like to ask about this story?
- Why is this story a little more difficult to react to than some of the other material in this video?
- Think about the three people whose stories are examined in this video. With whom do you feel the greatest connection? Identify two or three aspects of his/her experience that make you feel this way.
- What the stolen children and their families have lost can never be given back to them, but is there any way in which white Australia can make some amends for the wrong that was done to these people? ■



People like me, we think in circles ... If that circle gets broken, people don't know what to do, they become confused ... But there's a good way we can join that circle back up again and that's by reaching out.



Questions and Activities

• The speakers in this film use many metaphors to describe the social and emotional dislocation experienced by stolen children and their families. Archie Roach speaks of a circle that is broken; Jean Carter uses the analogy of scar tissue, 'a big ulcer over this land'; and Josie Farrer says 'a lot of us, we had to build a brick wall in our brain, to try and save ourselves'. Josie also uses the image of an uprooted tree.

• Think of other metaphors and images that help to bring the experiences of loss and pain to life.

• The film explores the experiences of Jean McKenzie Carter, Sam Murray, Alec Kruger, Ruby Hunter and Archie Roach. Write a brief summary of the separation and rediscovery experiences of each of these people. Which had the greatest impact on you and why?

• Jean Carter's story was a little different from many others in that she was taken from an inner-suburban home in Sydney and moved to a girls' home at Cootamundra in the NSW bush. How does what happened to Jean prove that the policy was not based on 'what was best for the child'?

• When Jean's mother died, Jean was told that there was no need for her to attend the funeral because 'she didn't know her mother very well'. How does this attitude compare with modern notions of dealing with grief and loss?

• Alec Kruger finally escaped the oppression of life on a cattle station to enlist in the army. He says that after enlisting, he knew he was safe. Is there anything ironic about this?

• It has been suggested that Ruby's story is one of the most tragic, because of what it shows about the hypocrisy of the welfare authorities. How does it do this?

• David Prosser is the grandson of a stolen person. Describe ways that the trauma of being taken can affect later generations in the same family.

• Paul Kelly says that he wrote his song ('Land of the Little Kings') in 1998 in response to a number of things going on in Australia. What were they?

• One of the lines in 'Land of the Little Kings' is 'so many lies in the name of history'. What are some of the lies that have been told about Australia's past, especially in relation to Indigenous people? Why have the 'liars' been able to get away with it until now? How can we ensure that the truth will be told in the future?

• Using the Paul Kelly song as a model, write a poem or song set in the year 2020 which celebrates some of the healing that you hope will take place over the next twenty years.

• Kelly also says that he hopes he will not have to go on singing this song. What will need to happen to make the song irrelevant by 2010?

• Archie Roach says of his memory of his family, 'They just gave me back to me'. See if you can capture and represent this feeling in a symbolic way, through poetry, art or music.

• As a class, try to think of ways in which you can bring an awareness of the stolen generations to others in your local community. ■

Lousy Little Sixpence, Stolen Generation, and Land of the Little Kings are available through Ronin Films:

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